St Culshaw M-S (1932-1943) 1949 AW42 Santal AW42
[The Santal Christian Community]

CHAPTER 14

THE NEW COMMUNITY

The Santal Christian community is more than an aggregate of individuals who have broken off from the tribe or have been born of parents who did so. It possesses a social life of its own; the individuals and families who compose it have opened their lives to a new influence and with it to a system of ideas that is capable of establishing a pattern of social behaviour distinct from the old. The new pattern will not be different in every respect from the old, which has much of value to contribute and which still exercises a powerful influence in certain directions. By examining the main trends in the present life of one particular community we may not be able to forecast what the pattern will be when Santals in far greater numbers have entered the Church, but we should be able to see the outlines of development in the years immediately ahead.

The great majority of the Santal Christians in the area have retained their status as villagers and cultivators. Their economic interests and activities are the same as those of their non-Christian neighbours. They toil for their daily bread and have to rely on the same aptitudes, skill and intelligent foresight and they earn respect according to the degree in which they display them. They maintain the traditional division of labour between men and women. The men plough the fields and repair their houses; they cut the trees of the forest and cart timber to the railway station. As the long lines of bullock carts enveloped in a cloud of red dust bump over the country roads, one finds here and there in the line a Christian man urging on his pair of bullocks. In bad years when a crowd of men are thronging round the office of the local police station to receive their cultivation loans from the government the Christians take their turn with the rest. The women do the work of the house and take the customary share in the cultivation of the fields and in the food-gathering activities of the village women. The men play their part in the annual hunts and the heads of the household sit with the rest of the villagers in the councils of the village and the tribe.

In spite of the common interests and activities which bind the villagers together irrespective of religious allegiance, the Santal Christian is immediately aware of certain tensions which issue progressively in a breaking away from the old way of life.